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SUBJECT: FRENCH PRESIDENCY NEA ADVISER ON THE "COLOSSAL
SUCCESS" OF THE RELEASE FROM LIBYA OF THE BULGARIAN "MEDICS"

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4.(b), (d).

11. (C) In the course of a September 6 meeting largely devoted to Lebanon (septel notal), French Presidency adviser on NEA issues Boris Boillon spoke briefly about France's role in securing the release of Bulgarian "medics" from Libyan custody. Boillon stated that he was one of only three people other than President Sarkozy in the GOF -- Presidency Secretary General Claude Gueant, Diplomatic Adviser

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Jean-David Levitte, and himself -- fully in the loop. He accompanied Gueant and first lady Cecilia Sarkozy on both trips to Libya prior to the release. Although she proved critical to the release, Cecilia was only aware of part of the overall French effort. Boillon boasted, for example, that he listened in on all the phone calls Sarkozy made to Libyan leader Qadhafi. When asked whether he expected the National Assembly's investigative committee to summon him to testify when it convenes to review all aspects of the supposed "deal" the GOF struck with Libya to release the medics, Boillon said it was possible but he had not yet been identified as a participant much less a witness. Boillon seemed to revel a bit in his still secret role but surmised that it may only be a question of time before investigators catch on to his role, as he can clearly be seen in photos wearing sunglasses on the tarmac in Sofia after the release behind Mme. Sarkozy.

12. (C) Clearly still basking in the afterglow of what the Elysee considers an unbridled diplomatic triumph, Boillon attributed much of the success to the GOF astutely playing the "Sarkozy card" with Qadhafi. He said that Claude Gueant sold the Libyans on the notion that Sarkozy was a dynamic new European leader who would be able to influence the EU in ways that could break the diplomatic impasse over the medics and pave the way for a better EU/Libya relationship. Sarkozy agreed to supplement this with a promise to Qadhafi of an "excellent" bilateral relationship that would extend into all domains and provide economic/commercial as well as political and security benefits.

13. (C) We asked about the political downsides, if any, of this closer French relationship with Libya given its past. Boillon replied that most French have supported and praised the French initiative with Libya. He claimed this included average French citizens and transcended political dividing lines. Other than the political and press criticism (see below), the only organized opposition to rapprochement with Libya has come from the families of French victims of Libyan terrorism, notably the 1989 bombing of UTA flight 772 over Niger. Boillon recounted his meeting with representatives of these families who asked three things of the GOF: no deal over the six Libyan officials found guilty in absentia in French courts for their involvement in the UTA bombing (most notably Libyan military intelligence chief Abdallah Sanussi),

GOF help urging the Libyans to provide an additional five million euros in compensation for families that have fallen on hard times, and a GOF commitment to send a representative to Niger next year for a ceremony to open a memorial in the desert to the victims. Boillon indicated the GOF readily agreed to all three requests.

¶4. (C) While there is not story left to uncover, the press continues to look for details not yet unearthed or to exaggerate what it finds. This has been the case with the role of Mme. Sarkozy but also the arms contracts signed by EADS and other companies with the Libyans. Boillon professed that the arms deals were a genuine surprise for the GOF, and this "communications problem" was feeding the impression that there was more yet to be revealed. Boillon minimized the damage that could be done. Sarkozy remained very happy over the "colossal success" of his Libya initiative. The French "honeymoon" with Sarkozy will inevitably end, but Boillon was confident that it would not be over some as yet unrevealed aspect of "the deal" that led to the Bulgarians' release.

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